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ABSTRACT

"Choices" is a collection of 13 stories that George Ella Lyon, a writer of children's books, wrote specifically for adult new readers after conferring with adult basic education students in Kentucky. Although the individual stories are written from various people's points of view, they all tell of the dreams, hopes, and lives of working class people. Literacy teachers might offer several of the stories to their students simply to read. Six stories can serve as the focus of class discussions and other oral and written class activities, including activities requiring students to work in teams and develop charts and Venn diagrams. The ideas developed for using the stories with beginning readers were field tested in three separate adult basic education and literacy classes consisting primarily of female students who ranged in age from 23 to 65 years and whose reading level ranged from grade 1 to grade 12. Most of the students immensely enjoyed reading the stories aloud and participating in the class activities, and many students demonstrated noticeable improvements in their reading skills, vocabulary, and comprehension. The group discussion activities designed around the stories also helped students learn social skills and problemsolving skills together. (MN)

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Enhancing adult literacy in the State of Ohio

Teacher To Teacher

ED 423 410

Trade Book Teaching Ideas from the OLRC Reading Group

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Choices

Author: George Ella Lyon

Summary: George Ella Lyon, an accomplished writer of children's books, wrote this collection of stories (and its accompanying text, More Choices) specifically for adult new readers; in fact, she conferred with ABE students from Kentucky while creating the book. These 13 powerful stories are written from various people's points of view, telling about working-class American folks' dreams and their hopes and the realities of their lives.

Introductory Notes: These 13 stories are all about choices. The stories vary in length and in topic, but they share an important similarity: Each is a powerful vignette sure to capture readers' imaginations, spark conversation, and invite response.

You may read some stories aloud or learners may read them silently. Remember to give learners the chance to rehearse beforehand if they are to read orally. Teaching ideas for several of the stories are described below. Don't over-teach the book, however. Several of the stories might simply be read.

Nancy Padak

Teaching Ideas

"Getting Away"

Learners may enjoy considering the points of view of Lena, Lyndon, and Jimmy. One way to accomplish this would be for individuals (or pairs) to a) select a character and b) describe, either orally or in writing, how that character feels (or probably feels). Group discussion can then focus on similarities and differences in the points of view, along with reasons for each.

"Working"

Ask pairs of learners to a) discuss each of the quotes, b) decide if they agree or disagree with each, and c) formulate reasons for their choices. After pairs have discussed the quotes, whole-group sharing of decisions and reasons may prove beneficial.

"Careers, Willard, is what people have when they have money. They start out doing some little old thing and work their way up the ladder. The rest of us work at the same thing all of our lives. What we got is jobs."

"The place you come from, Willard, is like a mirror. You have to come back now and then just to look at yourself. And if you've got people here, and you come back enough, you may decide this is the place for you after all."

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"Singing"

Use the DR-TA procedure (See attached form on page 5.) Stopping points for discussion:

a) p. 16, after "over again"
b) p. 17, after "to Momma"
c) p. 19, at the mark
d) p. 20, after "everybody listened"
e) end

As a follow-up activity, learners may wish to respond to the following, through discussion or in writing:

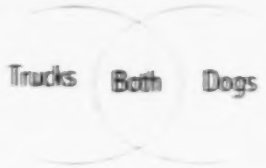
"Stories is where we come from."
"You owe it to your people."
"Do Clyde and Jessie have to do it all over again?"

"Falling"

Ask pairs of learners to make notes on the following chart. After pairs have completed their notes, invite whole group sharing. (See chart on page 4.)

"Trucking"

Learners may enjoy comparing Lige's ideas about trucks and dogs by using a Venn diagram. Pairs might work together, and whole group sharing might follow the pairs' work.



"Crying"

Use the DR-TA. Stopping points:

a) p. 48, after "he was gone or asleep"
b) p. 50 (top), after "I do not know."
c) end

As a follow-up learners may wish to write about or discuss whether they believe Lena did the right thing. Discussion of the meaning of the last two lines of the story might also prove interesting.

Field Testing

Two different teachers in three separate ABLE classes implemented the teaching suggestions. Reading ability ranged from 1st to 12th grades. Composed primarily of women, the groups varied in size from 4 to 10 people and in age from 23 to 65 years. Classes lasted for an hour or less once or twice a week. Participation in one class was voluntary.

Teacher's Changes or Additions: To deal with the low reading level in one class, the teacher used the stories to increase independent reading incrementally. She began by reading aloud to the class. On the next story, she asked students to choose a passage and practice reading it aloud in preparation for reading aloud in front of the class. By the third story, she introduced the DR-TA strategy, which provided an opportunity to understand why they had made a certain prediction. This was a difficult task the first time it was introduced but improved with repeated use of the strategy.

The other teacher used a team teaching approach so that one of them could record reactions and responses to be discussed together at the end of the day.

Another addition to the lesson guide occurred when some students continuously blurted out opinions and answers, which created a hostile atmosphere in the classroom. The teacher facilitated a session for developing group rules, which worked very smoothly thereafter.

One class expanded the project to include writing their own short stories about difficult choices that had made a difference in their lives. They employed their newfound social skills to make suggestions for revisions in small groups. One story was published in an Ohio Literacy Resource Center publication.

Teachers may want to introduce these stories after a class has achieved some degree of trust and unity. One teacher, who had a very successful experience field-testing these stories with an established group, found that a new class did not respond as positively to reading and discussing in groups.

Readers' Responses: Most students immensely enjoyed reading the stories aloud and participating in class activities each session. They also experienced many long-term benefits. Their reading skills, vocabulary and comprehension improved noticeably.

Students learned social skills and solved problems together. Non-readers became active readers and eager participants as the result of the encouragement from higher level readers. Several lower level students, who were quiet and reserved in the beginning, gradually began sharing their opinions and experiences. Students enjoyed the group activities so much that they began asking for "group" daily because "we learn better this way." Not only would absentees ask what happened in group, but also if they knew that they were going to be absent, they would ask the class to wait to have group until they returned in order not to miss the activities

One woman wrote in her journal about acquiring a "voice." She said the stories helped her see that she had opinions and could say them out loud; her husband was not the only one with opinions.

Benefits extended beyond the classroom. Students asked whether they could take the books home to read. They began taking other books from the classroom library and discussion them with their classmates. One student registered for a library card and began using the public library regularly.

Publication Information: Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1989. ISBN 0-8131-0900-0.

Reminders: ABLE teachers can order this book from Book Wholesalers, Inc. for 40% off list price. For other recommended books, see Recommended Trade Books for Adult Literacy Programs, available from ABLE Directors, public librarians, or online <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Resc/Trade/index.html>. Call the OLRC for details.

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	Got married because	Left the marriage because
Shirley		
Senior		

"Falling" Chart

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DR-TA: DIRECTED READING-THINKING ACTIVITY*

Overview: predicting, reading, proving; divergent thinking to convergent thinking

Materials: Fiction lending itself to prediction works well initially. After students are accustomed to DR-TAs, selections from content textbooks or other nonfiction can also be used. The teacher should decide beforehand where students will stop to discuss and predict.

Procedures:

1. Students read selection title (and perhaps a bit of the selection) and make predictions about content.
2. Students read to first predetermined stop. They confirm, refine, or reject their initial hypotheses and justify their ideas with reference to the text. Students then make new hypotheses.
3. Students read the next section and follow procedures in step two. This cycle continues until text is read.
4. Follow-up activities may be completed after the text is read.

Notes:

The teacher should facilitate (but not direct) thinking by asking questions such as, What do you think? Why do you think so? Can you prove it?

The teacher may summarize points that students make during the discussion, but should take care not to let his or her values or interpretations dominate. The teacher's role is to foster thoughtful student participation.

The teacher should not preteach vocabulary, set the purpose for reading, or ask the questions found in the teacher's manual.

*: The DL-TA, Directed Listening-Thinking Activity, proceeds in the same manner. The only difference is that the teacher reads the text to students.

For more information, see Stauffer, Russell G., Directing Reading Maturity as a Cognitive Process. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

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